THE COLLECTIVE ACTION INVOLVED IN THE REMOVAL AND RELOCATION OF SHAWNEETOWN, ILLINOIS

BY

ROBERT WILLIAM JANES

A.B., University of Chicago, 1938

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SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN SOCIOLOGY IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, 1942

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1. Problems and Methods

This study deals with the manner in which the social relationships existing in a community affected the course of a project requiring the collective action of that community. The hypothesis derived from this study is, that the course of collective action which is intended to meet a group crisis can be interpreted or understood in terms of the influence of the local social structure and value system upon this action. In the development of the Shawneetown relocation project, the lack of integreation of the local social structure produced the particular course taken by the project. This course was a product of the local social structure in that the crisis which confronted the community was self-imposed, inasmuch as the members of the community, acting together, proposed and initiated the establishment of the relocation project; yet, because they failed to provide the resources necessary for meeting the crisis, with the result that the non-local institutions introduced to accomplish relocation created consequences not anticipated by local persons when they initiated the crisis. The conclusions drawn from the study, especially when checked against certain comparative data, supply a basis for a hypothesis which pertains to the attempt of any community to meet, through collective action, a group crisis.

Shawneetown, a small town in Gallatin County, Illinois, was inundated in January 1937 by a flood of the Ohio river which compelled the fifteen hunderd residents to abandon the site for a period of several weeks. During that period of time certain members of the community proposed that the buildings of the town be moved to a new site on the hills about three miles west of the old river-bank site. A large number of townspeople expressed approval of this plan, and steps were taken to initiate the removal and relocation pro-

ject. A type of public corporation, the Gallatin County Housing Authority, was established to sponsor the removal and relocation of the town. This body acted in co-operation with a number of state and federal agencies, with the result that by the end of 1941 about fifty-five per cent of the population, residences, and commercial establishments had moved to the new site.

The problems for sociological investigation presented by these events center in the factors affecting the collective action which is necessary for the accomplishment of such a project. The aim of this study is to determine the factors which influenced the collective or group action represented by the removal and relocation project. The determination of these factors was accomplished as a result of examining data which pertained to three central problems, namely: first, what was the source or impetus to the establishment of the relocation project, and what members of the community provided the local leadership for its direction; secondly, how did the legal and political structure of the community enter into and affect the development of the relocation project; thirdly, how did the process of relocation affect the relationships between the members of the community.

The data accumulated to deal with these problems included materials derived from interviews and participant-observation in the community, registration data of local bodies, documentary materials, and reports from officials associated with the removal project. The determination of the local values, the form of relationships existing between members and classes of the community, and the attitudes of persons toward the removal project, as well as the social situation of these persons in the community was based on materials secured through interviews and participant-observation. These materials most adequately described the behavior of the upper-status group in the community; for the fact that the community was divided into three distinct social classes, the upper-status whites, the lower-status whites, and the negroes, made participant-observation, and, to a certain extent, interviews, difficult for one investigator during a relatively short period of residence

in the community. However, the fact that the upper-status white group originated and directed the removal project, made data secured from this group of greatest relative importance. The most important documentary source of data was the Shawneetown weekly newspaper, the files of which (from 1935 to 1942) were studied to secure data on the chronological development of the project, reported attitudes of the members toward the project, and on the class structure and social participation of members of the community. The registration data which were analyzed included the records of the grade school, county offices and relief organizations. Other documentary sources included state and county histories and primary accounts such as old newspapers and commercial directories. This type of data served mainly to cast light on the economic phases of the community history. A final body of materials included accounts of the experience of other communities which underwent the process of removal and relocation.

2. The Community Background

As the analysis of the relocation project was in terms of the social structure of the community and the local value system, background material describing the changes in the social structure were secured. These data described the historical background of the community and changes in the economic and social structures of the community. Economic data were doubly important because the type of economic functions supplied by the community which is, in the main, a farm-service and county seat town, affected the development of the relocation project, as is shown by the fact that functions dependent on the presence of the river, including the ferry and fishing, could not be relocated. The economic structure and type of occupation were also closely linked to the social structure and the recent changes of the social structure, since the lower-status white group of the community consists, for the most part, of members of the fifty per cent of the community which is dependent on some form of state or government aid.

The analysis of the class structure of the community in-

dicated that the persons of the upper status were, in general, characterized by longest residence in the community and by higher income. They dominated participation in the formal associations of the community, were mentioned most often in the columns of the newspaper for informal participation in social events; and they made up the personnel of the various professional and commercial ventures of the community. It was the younger and middle-aged members of this group who originated and directed the removal project, and who were among the first to move to the new site.

Evidence indicated a marked lack of integration and stability in the local social structure. Many of the families who had once been leading families, or "old families," had left the community because of the declining prosperity and changes in economic function. In the last twenty years there has been a heavy turnover in management of the commercial establishments of the community; half of a sample of the local business men have come into the town from other places. The local history of the community served as a value to members of the upper-status white group and, in some cases, supplied a source of friction between them and persons who were rising in the local social scale and did not have this historical orientation. Another source of friction and tension was indicated by a type of factionalism reflected in attacks on the integrity of other members of the community and in a traditional partisanship in respect to any issue which confronted the local group. This partisanship or factionalism was most often expressed in statements which attributed the decline of the community to the cupidity or avarice of local persons or families, even though this charge was not substantiated by other data describing the economic development of the community. Another example of the lack of group integration was the social distance between the upper-status white group and the lower-status white group. The families of the lower-status group showed a high rate of mobility, which limited the possibility of their absorption into the local social structure. Much of their behavior was apparently symptomatic of a socially disorganized class of persons. The high rate of emigration by the

younger generation of upper-status white families indicated that the local community was not able to hold younger persons. (A reversal of this trend had taken place since the depression, when younger persons no longer found jobs in urban areas; but this temporary reversal of the trend had not led to an increased integration of the community. In fact, there was indication that conflict centering in the removal project reflected to some extent the taking over of control of community affairs by these younger persons, with resultant tension within the upper-status group.) A final index of a lack of integration was a feeling of pessimism and doubt concerning the future of the community. This attitude was expressed most often by the youngest and oldest generations of the town.

3. The Development of the Removal and Relocation Project

The influence of the local social structure is seen in the development of arrangements for the removal of buildings from the old site, and in the development of the new site. These arrangements were made through the Gallatin County Housing Authority, the local sponsor of the project, which worked in co-operation with the outside state and government agencies supplying the capital necessary for removal. The fact that the other co-operating agencies, (including the Works Progress Administration, Disaster Loan Corporation, Reconstruction Finance Corporation, Illinois State Housing Board, Illinois Department of Public Works, and others), furnished the capital for the project largely determined its administrative course. This situation led to delays in securing co-operation of agencies and to confusion as to the terms of relocation offered to local residents, all of which encouraged a growing doubt among townspeople that the removal would ever be accomplished. It also took the direction and planning of the project out of the hands of the local Housing Authority and placed it with representatives of the co-operating agencies, who, by virtue of the fact that they supplied the capital, assumed the right to direct its use. An alternative procedure

would have been for local residents to establish a body or association such as a non-profit corporation to which they would subscribe the capital, as did at least one other community in the same situation. This failure represents this lack of integration of the local social structure; no one was willing to adopt the proposal of a state official, that local persons pool their property as capital for such a corporate body which could initiate the project. It should be noted, however, that a body with powers such as the Gallatin County Housing Authority possessed probably would have been necessary to accomplish removal as long as there was any need to condemn property to acquire a site for the new town; though aside from this function, a private, non-profit corporation could probably have performed equally successfully all the other phases of removal and relocation, including the securing of co-operation by outside agencies, the arrangement of the sale of lots and the transfer of property in the old town to that in the new town, assistance in the planning of the new site, etc.

In meeting these problems and in dealing with other aspects of the removal, the functions of the Housing Authority were often complicated by the fact that the evolution of the project involved the local legal and political structure. In fact, many of the phases of the project could be accomplished only by the functioning of local political institutions. A municipal election was necessary to approve the annexation of the new site to the old site. Not only was such an election necessary, but also the city council had to pass an ordinance approving of the annexation. Had not the voters of the community and the members of the city council approved of such action, the removal project would have been seriously hampered if not entirely prevented. At least six such instances ocurred in which action of political institutions was necessary. In several cases the relocation also became involved in the legal structure, in that individuals contended that their legal rights were infringed upon, and attempted to obstruct removal by means of the courts. The most striking case of such action by the anti-moving group was a quo warranto suit instituted against the city of Shawneetown by residents of the old town who charged

that they were deprived of rightful services by the city authorities on the ground that the annexation of the new site was illegal. In at least five instances the courts handed down decisions on cases involving legal rights affected by the removal project. In all cases the court decisions upheld the legality of the actions which were intended to facilitate the project. These cases were another indication of the lack of unanimity or integration among the members of the community in regard to the project, though the various elections indicated that about seventy-five per cent of the voting residents consistently favored acts which facilitated removal and relocation at the new site.

The approval or disapproval of the relocation project was stated in terms of a local value system as represented by the objects toward which local behavior was oriented. These values, or objects of behavior-orientation, varied to a certain extent among the class groups of the community. Some of the values which were characteristic of the upper-status group included the differentiation between members and non-members of the community, the local historical tradition, economic success, property ownership and financial independence, feeling of social distance toward the lower-status white group, and consideration of the future of the community. All of these values were appealed to by local persons as the basis of their attitudes toward the relocation project, regardless of whether these persons approved or disapproved of the undertaking. The fact that persons who appealed to the same values could arrive at opposite points of view suggested that there must be a different weighting of such values. This difference in weighting seemed to represent a difference in status or in social situation of persons The characteristics which were associated with an individual's social situation included his age, business, property ownership, race, and his local class position. Individuals who occupied the status of older persons owning business property tended to oppose the project. They appealed to the values of financial independence and the future of the community, giving them a different weighting than did the younger and middle-aged business men of

the community who, in most cases, did not own business property, and who were the leaders in promoting the project.

4. Results of the Project

The local value system and the pattern of relationships between the individuals and the class groups of the community, with the exception of economic competition, have not been significantly affected by the removal and relocation project, though at the present time it is rather difficult to say what will be the long-run influence of this project on the community. The participation in local associations, formal and informal, has not, apparently, been greatly affected by the moving. Frictions and tensions between individuals and between class groups which arose from differences in attitude toward the project attained prominence. However, such frictions and conflict situations existed in the community prior to the development of the project, and this served only to intensify, and in some cases to redirect, these differences between individuals and class groups. The principal point where the relationships between members of the community have been affected is in the economic competition between the business districts of the old and new sites. Merchants who formerly co-operated in the attempt to draw customers to a common business district are now competing vigorously with one another. Because of the importance of community values revolving about economic activity and economic success, this tension point threatens to play an important role in future relationships between members of the community.

Class relationships have not been markedly affected by the removal project. During the early period of development of opinion on the project, members of both the upper-status white and lower-status white groups approved of the undertaking, but this fact did not seem to affect the relations between these two groups; ecological segregation by class groups is even more marked in the new town than in the old one. The negro group could buy lots only in one section of the town; and the more desirable lots in the best section of town

were priced so high as to discourage the lower-status white group from acquiring them. This segregation by class groups represents one of the values of the upper-status group, but it is one of the few examples where such values were expressed in planning for the new site, and there is a considerable body of opinion in the town that the economic interests, at least, were not adequately provided for in the plans and layout of the new site. These plans were made by technicians and administrators representing the co-operating agencies, and there is evidence that there was not complete rapport between these persons and the townspeople. The standards of construction and minimum requirements for residences set up by some of these outsiders were at variance with local standards; for as the local role of the co-operating government agencies was limited due to national curtailment of their funds, action by local persons relaxed these standards. These facts suggest that professional town planners have not fully established a body of knowledge which deals with the problems of small farm-service communities.

5. Conclusions

The development and course of the Shawneetown removal and relocation reflected the social structure of the community and the local value system. The project was executed in terms of the local upper-status group values, although in some stages of its evolution, the values and standards of the co-operating agencies were injected into the process. The originators of the project were members of the upper-status group in the community, and the control and direction of the project, insofar as this was a local matter, lay with this group. The opposition to the project also grew up in, and was directed by, members of the upper-status group. The basis of the attitudes of opposition to and approval of the project depended on the social situation of the persons who expresed these attitudes. However, in the cases of exceptions to the behavior expected of persons in a certain status, individual factors such as the temperamental or "psycho-genetic" influences which were inaccessible to the investigator might have been the determining forces.

The social structure of the community did not seem to be highly integrated, for there was no group unanimity in respect to common problems requiring group action. This lack of unanimity was shown by the formal attack on the project in the courts, and also in the informal campaign of rumor and gossip leveled against it. This lack of community integration or cohesion was associated with the declining economic prosperity, the rapid turnover of business establishments, the high mobility of families of lower status, the departure of families of highest status, the emigration of the younger members of families in the upper-status group, and the feeling of social distance between members of the class groups. The pessimistic attitude of certain members of the community toward its future may be another contributing factor in their inability to co-operate. However, comparison with the course of development of other community relocation projects indicates that the decline in economic function cannot alone account for a lack of integration. It would appear from a comparison of the experience of Shawneetown to that of other communities which went through the same process, that the local social structure and system of values determined the conduct of the removal and relocation project in the ways outlined above.

VITA

Robert William Janes was born in Chicago, Illinois on September 24, 1916. He received his elementary and secondary-school education in the public schools of Oak Park, Illinois where he graduated from high school in 1934. He entered the University of Chicago in 1934, and received the B.A. degree and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa in 1938. After taking his M.A. degree at the University of Chicago in the summer of 1939, he continued his graduate work at the University of Illinois, where he also served as part-time research assistant in the Department of Sociology during the year 1939-1940. During the academic years 1940-42 he acted in this Department as a part-time teaching assistant.